## How not to interact with the red fox on Fort Carson

by Richard Bunn DECAM

If you work or live on Fort Carson, chances are you have seen a red fox. The red fox has successfully adapted to life in our urban and suburban environments. In fact, the Garrison area is about the only place on Fort Carson where you will see one of these beautiful animals. Why is that? We built these homes, shops, and motor pools for soldiers and their families. While these buildings provide places for us to work and live, they also provide habitat for a surprising variety of critters. One of them is the red fox.

The red fox is an omnivore, meaning it eats what ever is available, which makes it susceptible to handouts from humans. Although foxes are successful predators, they are also very successful scavengers. Foxes generally avoid contacts with humans, but many foxes living in the vicinity of people have learned to associate humans with food. Recent research indicates red foxes living in urban and suburban areas hunt less and scavenge more, suggesting that fed foxes in Fort Carson's Garrison are probably hunting less. The mice don't care, so why should you?

## Why it's a bad idea to feed foxes on Fort Carson

- 1. Feeding foxes entices them to stay and den in areas where you work and live. Seems like a benign activity, but you might get more than you expected. Foxes very susceptible to rabies and other diseases, including sarcoptic mange and distemper. Sarcoptic mange is a parasitic mite that can be passed to humans (scabies) and dogs. Repeated contact with humans makes a fox less wary of humans in general, increasing the chances of uninvited contact. If you are feeding a fox, you might feel no harm can come to you. Maybe so, but you can't guarantee the safety of children, your coworkers or neighbors, or pets. In a way, feeding a fox is really inviting it to live with everyone in your community.
- 2. Fox densities are generally much higher in suburban than rural areas. Providing supplemental food allows fox population density to increase because a smaller area can support more animals. Inherently, this seems like a good thing, but the opposite is true. Sustaining an artificially high population of animals creates an environment in which diseases can quickly spread through the population. On the surface, feeding seems helpful, but you are in fact increasing their chances of contracting a debilitating or fatal disease.
- 3. Feeding foxes attracts larger predators that are either attracted to the food or move into the area to prey on the foxes. In this case, we're talking about coyotes. The coyote is a common fox predator, especially on young kits. Attracting coyotes into the Fort Carson Garrison and housing divisions is nothing but trouble. Coyotes present a real danger to small pets and a fenced yard will not keep them out.

## What you can do

- 1. Encourage foxes to hunt for natural prey by not feeding them. The dietary supplements you provide are not necessary, and could even be harmful.
- 2. Discourage foxes from savaging by securing trashcans with tight-fitting lids. Do not leave pet food out overnight.

For more information about Fort Carson's wildlife or to report a hazardous wildlife situation, contact the DECAM Wildlife Office at 576-8074. DECAM biologists are available to teach classes at your school or Directorate. For more information on these classes contact 576-7075.